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ABSTRACT

In a personal narrative reflecting on 27 years of teaching, an adjunct faculty member realizes that she knows quite a bit firsthand about the adjunct. Judith Gappa and David Leslie, in their 1993 book, "The Invisible Faculty," state that budgets are balanced and classes assigned on the assumption that 20 to 50% of all undergraduate sections will be taught by temporary faculty members, and that 35 to 38% of all faculty members teach part-time in colleges and universities. Gappa and Leslie note that this faculty is growing, not just numerically, but also increasingly angry. In one university's English department, during 1996's fall semester 45% of all courses were taught by adjuncts, as were 80% of the composition and professional writing courses. Generally, the adjuncts who remain at one institution for a long time are those who become involved within the department in ways other than simply teaching their classes. Some department directors, recognizing the commitment and competence of adjuncts with years of experience, consciously involve those adjuncts in the review and change of course guidelines. Some are compensated financially for assuming duties such as supervising the composition faculty and chairing committees. Responsibility for continuing education for part-time faculty is often shared by the adjunct and the university. Posting published articles and publicizing poetry readings by adjunct faculty increase part-timers' morale, heighten awareness of adjunct talent, and tighten the bond between part-time and full-time faculty members. In many cases, however, the academic community must do more for its adjunct citizens. (NKA)

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Citizen Responsibility By and For Part-Time Faculty

A small tin box sits on the top shelf of a file cabinet in my office at the University. That box holds items like band aids, hairspray, an extra pair of pantyhose, a small screw driver and wrench set, a metal spoon, staples and chewing gum. For years that box was my office. Sometimes it sat in the trunk of my car; in more fortunate times, it occupied a borrowed bookcase shelf in a shared office or a file cabinet drawer emptied by a professor gracious enough to offer a drawer of privacy for an adjunct.

For the past 5 years the box has been relatively unused in the office that I share with another adjunct at the University. I have been fortunate, indeed, for these past 5 years of 27 years of adjunct teaching to have an office, a computer, a desk, and file cabinets to call my own. So what if I have to pry the file cabinet drawer open with the spoon handle? It really doesn't matter too much that my office mate and I struggle with two other drawers that don't always open in the other file cabinet. We adjuncts at our university do not take lightly the resources our school provides us.

As I reflect on my past 27 years of teaching and on the faculty I have taught with, I realize that I know first hand quite a bit about the adjunct. I know from experience some adjuncts' horror stories. I know of the isolation and the exploitation of the often "invisible" adjuncts. I know of their struggle for resources and benefits. I know of the lack of

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recognition and respect for their work--work often done remarkably well. However, I also know something of the satisfaction that comes to those adjuncts who are keenly aware of their responsibility to the university system and to those students who sit under their teaching. These responsible adjuncts are the ones who come forward in their academic community and respond to the needs of their students by taking risks themselves. They are the ones who bond with the university's department, who teach new courses, and who continue to educate themselves in innovative ways.

In responding to an Internet listserv to the OAH Newsletter (Organization of American Historians) in November of 1996, Kathryn Kemp, who teaches in Atlanta, Georgia, describes "'part-time work...whether at the burger joint or the university [as] the management strategy of the decade. For state university systems struggling with tight budgets, it's irresistible.'" Judith Gappa and David Leslie in The Invisible Faculty, published in 1993 state that "budgets are balanced and classes assigned on the assumption that 20, 30, or 50 percent of all undergraduate sections will be taught by faculty members who are hired for a temporary assignment" (2). Gappa and Leslie further indicate that "between 35-38 percent of all faculty members" teach part-time in colleges and universities (2). The part-time teaching population at community colleges, according to the Pocket Profile of Community Colleges, is even higher--65 percent.

Gappa and Leslie note that this adjunct faculty is growing, and not just numerically. It is growing increasingly angry at

being "unrecognized, underrewarded, and invisible" in the academic profession. My own university seems to fit the trend noted in the hiring of part-time faculty. In the fall semester of 1996, adjunct faculty taught 45% of all courses offered through our English Department and 80% of our composition and professional writing courses. Currently, adjuncts are staffing 46% of the total department courses offered and 76% of the composition and professional writing courses in our 1997 spring semester. Who are these invisible adjuncts who teach writing to so many of our college students each year? What are their skills, and how can the university ensure that the needs of all concerned are met--those of the university, the students, and the adjunct faculty?

While many full-time faculty view adjunct faculty as transient, non-committed, undereducated and unskilled--experience often reveals otherwise. The November OAH Newsletter poll results revealed that adjuncts are a diverse lot: "Some are full-time part-timers with Ph.D.s, some are ABDs, some teach part-time while pursuing other careers, some are married and are not the chief or sole breadwinners. Half of the people...are women."

In another article Yasmin Khan revealed that "a study at the Mercer County Community College in New Jersey published last year...reported 'no significant difference between the amount of learning of students taught by full-time and part-time faculty'" (article2.html 19Jan97). Gappa and Leslie indicate that a study done by Lowther (1990) "confirms with empirical data...very little difference between how part-and full-time faculty prepare

for courses" and that "policymakers [should] be cautious in assuming...part-time faculty...inferior to...full-time faculty" (126). Nor are adjuncts the transient and uncommitted faculty that many assume. Nancy Avakian of Onəndaga Community College in Syracuse, NY, indicates that "a review of the literature reveals that, on average, two-thirds of adjunct faculty members in all colleges and universities remain in appointments for only one semester; the remaining one-third continue to teach at the same institution for six and one half years (avakian@goliath.sunyocc.edu).

My own adjunct experience is similar to these statistics. I taught two years at one university, a year or so at a community college, fifteen years at another university (the last year there in a full-time instructor position) and am in my sixth year at my current university, as is my adjunct officemate. Termination with each of the institutions was a result of my family's relocation. During each teaching experience, I observed some adjunct faculty leave after only one or two appointments; however, I saw others return year after year to continue part-time teaching at the same institution. The adjuncts who leave after only one or two appointments are often those who have failed to find mentors willing to show them the department ropes; they are those who arrive to teach classes and who leave without speaking to other faculty or without being spoken to. The adjuncts who stay are usually those who become involved within the department in ways other than simply teaching their classes.

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Some adjunct contracts specify that the adjuncts' responsibilities do not require committee work or attendance at department meetings. However, those adjuncts who are invited and who agree to serve on committees, such as Composition Committees, bond more easily with the permanent faculty, often choosing to attend department meetings even though adjuncts are disenfranchised.

Some department directors, recognizing the commitment and competence of adjuncts with years of teaching experience, consciously involve those adjuncts in the review and change of course guidelines. Often adjuncts become a rotating part of a team whose responsibility is to observe and evaluate other adjunct faculty on a routine, systematic basis and to review and recommend text books. When adjuncts become involved with the department in any of these ways, they become visible; they gain voices and feel a part of the university community.

I am fortunate to be a part of a department that encourages adjuncts to assume responsibility. Recently when our department director was granted leave for a year to work on her doctorate, I--an adjunct--was appointed acting director in her absence. I was compensated financially for assuming duties such as supervising the composition faculty, chairing our Composition Committee, conducting holistic grading sessions, and overseeing teaching assistant evaluations. Departmental responsibilities, especially when they include financial compensation, dramatically increase the adjunct's feeling of citizenship in the university community. Further commitment comes when the university seeks

ways to encourage the adjunct faculty's continued training and education.

Responsibility for continuing education for part-time faculty is often shared by the adjunct and the university. Institutions sometimes offer partial travel pay for adjuncts to attend major conferences or to present papers. Others offer seminars like our university's two-week summer workshop where adjunct faculty will receive a stipend for attending a seminar to study how new approaches to teaching fit into traditional methods.

New equipment and technology also call for education updating. Our university is fortunate to have a department director currently working on a project to establish listservs to provide easy communication access between all full-time and part-time faculty. In anticipation of increased computer access, several of our adjuncts have attended training sessions in our computer department and in our computer-aided classroom. Such a practical matter as failure to train faculty in using office machines or computer-aided classroom equipment often becomes a barrier for the adjuncts who spend only a portion of their week at the university.

Many adjuncts teach early or late classes when secretaries or work-study students are not available to duplicate materials or answer questions about equipment. If an adjunct is to function efficiently, the university department must provide both equipment and training for adjuncts. Adjuncts must have access to computers, printers, and copiers and must know how to operate

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these resources. Providing this access and training keeps the adjunct from depending on the services of departmental secretaries or work study students who are often overloaded themselves with faculty paperwork. Providing necessary material resources and sharing financially in the adjunct's continued education further increase the adjunct faculty's commitment to the academic community.

The responsible adjunct, in addition, contributes individually to his own continuing education, sometimes in innovative ways. Realizing that funds are limited for travel and involvement in the larger academic community, the adjunct often relies on professional journals and online discussions as a means of keeping abreast of current pedagogy and methodology. Some adjuncts involve themselves in professional societies. For several years I was a board member and treasurer of the Alabama Council of Teachers of English, the state affiliate of NCTE. As a board member, I helped organize annual state programs for ACTE and presented papers at seminars throughout the state. I also served as State Coordinator for the NCTE Achievement in Writing Awards Program. I was an active participant at high school articulation conferences through our university department and helped organize and conduct writing and grading workshops for the Birmingham City Board of Education. These activities provided valuable opportunities for my staying attuned to current teaching methods and ideas.

Other ways of individual education have been even more innovative, however. For example, I have benefitted in more than

financial ways from invitations to read holistically for the Educational Testing Service. For several years I have read CLEP, SAT, AP, and GMAT essays as well as Florida's CLAST exams. This work provides personal enjoyment in meeting other teachers from throughout the United States. Between reading times we share our concerns and convictions about education. I always feel that I come back from an ETS session reading faster and more confidently than before. Because of the excellent training in those national grading sessions, I have been responsible for conducting holistic grading sessions in our own department, sessions that allow our local faculty to examine each other's grading ideology and to better standardize the grading of our own students' compositions. These opportunities to read national exams, conduct writing and grading workshops, and participate in professional organizations have been an invaluable source of continuing education, often initiated by me individually, but beneficial to my department in many ways.

Another facet of shared continuing education presents a challenge for the adjunct and sometimes for the department as well. All too often adjuncts teach the same class each semester, usually Composition I or II or perhaps a Practical Grammar class. Some university departments require that all English faculty members teach a composition class at least once during the academic year, hoping to further strengthen the understanding between full-time and adjunct faculty of the time, difficulty, and value involved in teaching and grading composition. Such a departmental policy then frees up a number of literature courses-

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-normally taught by full-time faculty--which then become available for adjunct faculty. Without the availability and the encouragement to teach new courses, adjuncts soon burn out, finding teaching composition less and less enjoyable each semester.

The ability to create and teach new courses, though a challenge, revitalizes and further educates the adjunct. Our university, though not requiring all faculty to teach a composition course each year, does attempt to offer adjuncts some variety in what they teach. Because of budget constraints, we do not have enough full-time literature faculty to staff all our literature courses. As a result of the shortfall, our adjuncts benefit by teaching a few literature and professional writing courses instead of only Composition I and II. Through the challenge of teaching new material, our adjuncts continue to grow intellectually and professionally.

The department that seeks to fulfill its responsibility for the continued education of its adjunct faculty often fosters an awareness of the talents of its part-time faculty. Both literature and experience indicate that the adjunct faculty is talented. Gappa and Leslie record that part-timers have "written novels, published poetry, run theaters and performing arts centers [producing]...creative work of high quality" (Invisible Faculty 195). Posting published articles and publicizing poetry readings by our adjunct faculty increase part-time morale, heighten awareness of adjunct talent, and tighten the bond between part-time and full-time faculty members.

During the past six years I have co-authored two student essay books used in our freshman composition courses. These projects have resulted in recognition--for both the instructors who participated and for the students whose essays were selected for publication. Our students, less intimidated by the "real" students' essays than by professional models, compete for space in the next student edition. More practically, the book offers us who teach composition a collection of usable, familiar, good essays. A departmental atmosphere that allows adjuncts freedom to create and one that actively encourages professional development and responsibility will gain the loyalty and commitment of those adjuncts willing and able to compromise benefits and salary for greater academic community involvement.

As I have reflected on my own adjunct teaching career, I realize that I have been fortunate to have encountered excellent mentors and directors. For the most part I have been afforded the physical resources and the training and freedom to use office equipment. I have not been dependent on my teaching salary for my livelihood, and perhaps that fact alone has made my career as an adjunct more pleasant than that of many of my colleagues. I have been able, for the most part, to schedule my teaching around my child-rearing duties, teaching at night when the children were young and during the day as they became schoolaged. Seldom have I taught in the summers, preferring instead to travel with my family. The flexibility of my schedule has allowed time for community and church involvement in adult literacy programs and orchestra. It has also allowed me the time and energy to become

involved in professional activities without feeling exploited or martyred.

Others who teach part-time, I realize, are not so fortunate. Many adjuncts teach at more than one university or community college. They are tired, physically and mentally. I have seen many very good adjuncts leave the profession to return to school to pursue law and medical degrees, realizing that the meager adjunct salary could no longer provide them a living. Others have accepted better paying jobs as technical writers and still others have returned to teach in high school classrooms. For the most part these colleagues have regretted having to leave the university community. However, they could no longer face the low pay, the cramped office space, or the feeling of being second-class citizens with limited responsibilities in their academic community. I can understand their frustration.

In the midst of reflecting about the adjunct's situation while writing this paper and ascertaining that, for me anyway, things have definitely improved through the years, I walked through my relatively spacious office, past my seldom used little tin box and into our mailroom. We were one month into the semester and were to receive our first paycheck. My mailbox was empty. When questioned, our secretary checked her files to see that I had returned my signed contract. I had. She then called the payroll department, who had no record that I was teaching at the University this semester. When our secretary assured the speaker that I was indeed due a paycheck, the following questions

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were posed: 1) was I a student? 2) did I have another job? 3) was I destitute? What difference should this information make?

Horror stories--gathered over the past 27 years--resurfaced. What if I had been destitute and dependent on that paycheck for food or rent? I have known adjuncts in just that same situation. My financial situation should have had no bearing whatsoever on my receiving my paycheck. I am a professional who provides a service for my university. At that moment, however, I was just an adjunct who would have to wait four more days until a check could be approved and issued from a revolving account, an account that withheld 10 percent of that meager check as a "holdback fee" to be issued in the next check two weeks later. As much as I want to think that universities are granting and allowing adjuncts more citizen responsibility and respect in their academic communities, I know that not enough is being done for part-time faculty. The academic community must do more for its adjunct citizens. Maybe I shouldn't do away with my little tin box just yet.

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